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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, January 7, 1932

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "Canned Versus Fresh Foods." Information approved by the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

That eternal job of providing good meals for the family at low cost presents a new problem at this time of the year--the problem of whether to use canned or fresh foods. Our grandmothers fed their families during the winter largely on the foods that could be stored in their spacious cold cellars. We housekeepers today not only have stored vegetables but we also have canned and fresh foods to choose from. But the fresh vegetables on the market these winter months are not so plentiful nor so inexpensive as at other seasons of the year. The question is then: Shall we serve canned vegetables to the family until the new crop of fresh products comes on in the market bringing lower prices and more variety?

Before that question can be decided, there are several things that the modern homemaker will turn over in her mind. First, she'll ask herself, what about the food value in canned vegetables as compared to the food value in fresh vegetables? Will the children get the same valuable minerals, vitamins and so on from the vegetables in cans that they do from the fresh? Then there's flavor to consider. Flavor has so much to do with appetite and the enjoyment of a food. There's ease of preparation to consider also. And finally, there's that big item of expense. Quite a lot for the homemaker to think of in deciding whether she should pay a few cents more for fresh spinach, say, or should buy it in cans.

Recently a professor of nutrition at the University of California, Dr. Ruth Okey, made a short talk on this very subject. I know that you'll be interested in hearing her helpful advice on the matter, so I'm going to quote parts of what she said.

"The other day, I bought a fresh pineapple at a price slightly higher than the cost of a can of the best canned fruit. My friend, who was standing nearby exclaimed, 'Why go to the trouble of peeling and fixing a fresh pineapple when you can buy it more cheaply all prepared in cans?'"

"I told her that the difference in flavor was worth both the effort and the slight difference in cost to me.

"Is there any more food value in the fresh than in the canned pineapple?" she inquired.

"I had to acknowledge that, except for a fraction of the vitamins B and C, the food value of the canned product was almost equal to that of the fresh.

"Well, remarked my friend, 'I certainly can see no reason for bothering to prepare fresh foods when canned products are so inexpensive and so much easier on the housewife.'

"In fact, this friend finds the canned products so easy that she is very likely to serve canned spinach when the fresh is in the market at two cents a pound. Or canned carrots when the fresh are to be had at one cent a bunch.

"What about the food value of canned as compared to fresh spinach?

"The two scientists, Kohman and Eddy, who experimented with rats to learn the vitamin content of various foods, found that commercially canned spinach in evacuated cans was actually far richer in vitamin C than their home-cooked variety. But that is not really a fair test for us to go by, since the rats ate spinach direct from the can, while we eat it only after it has been reheated--sometimes for a considerable time. This extra heating, of course, destroys some of the vitamins. Then there's the question of how the home-cooked spinach given those rats was prepared. There are ways and ways of cooking spinach. Some methods save more vitamins A and C than others. And the kind fed to the rats was not prepared by the best vitamin-saving methods.

"As for the third vitamin to be considered--vitamin B, this is destroyed rapidly by heating to a temperature above the boiling point of water, as done in commercial canning. Vitamin B is an important item, since it is necessary for normal appetite and growth and especially for the normal activity of the digestive tract.

"As we all know these days, most of our canned foods have to be heated to temperatures above the boiling point of water to make them safe. We couldn't ask our canners to reduce either the time or the temperature of processing canned fruits and vegetables, for foods canned with too little heat are likely places for the growth of that death-dealing organism causing botulism. While less heat might save more vitamin B, it would cause danger to health and even life.

"The National Canners' Association deserves our gratitude for its long and careful investigation of the amount of heat necessary to kill the spores of this dangerous organism, and for the care with which it sees to the inspection of canneries to ascertain that the safety requirements of our canned foods are fully met.

"The situation seems to be this, then. If we are to use canned instead of fresh fruits and vegetables, we must provide vitamin B in our diet from some other source. Fortunately there is a source at very low price this year---our whole-grain products---unpolished rice, wheat germ and so forth.

"In our work in feeding children at the University of California, we have found that better growth and better health for the children result from feeding them more fresh fruits and vegetables, or by feeding canned fruits and vegetables plus vitamin B in the form of wheat-germ bread.

"Which to use then, canned or fresh products? Use canned fruits and vegetables when the supply of fresh products is limited, or when the cost of fresh products is much higher than canned. But when you use canned foods, keep in mind their lacks and limitations and plan the rest of the menu accordingly."

That's all about canned foods today. Before I forget, I want to mention something very important that I left out yesterday. Remember that we were talking

about winter play suits for the children yesterday? Well, I completely forgot to tell you where you could get the patterns for these suits, in case you want to make one for Jane or Junior. Patterns for two of the suits shown in the leaflet I mentioned, called "Play Suits for Winter" are being made now by commercial pattern companies. The suits were designed by the Bureau of Home Economics, but the Bureau does not sell patterns. It does, however, have a list of the companies making the patterns. This list gives the name of the suit, the number of the pattern and the company that makes the pattern. Remember the nice play suit with knitted bands? One company is selling a pattern for that. And that football or aviator's suit in the leaflet? You can also buy a pattern for that. Write to me for the names and addresses of these pattern companies and I'll be glad to send them.

Tomorrow: "Breakfast on Sunday Morning."

